

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----- 095446

P 191240Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1985

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TRIPOLI 0200

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: TECH, PARM, PFOR

SUBJECT: LIBYAN OFFICIAL ASKS FOR PROMPT U.S. DECISION ON
SALE OF TRIGA III REACTOR AND FUEL

REF: STATE 20585

1. SUMMARY: DIRECTOR GENERAL OF LIBYAN ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION SUMMONED CHARGE TO SAY HE IS PUZZLED AND BITTER ABOUT WHAT HE SEES AS U.S. CHANGE OF MIND ON EXPORT OF ATOMIC RESEARCH REACTOR AND FUEL. ONE YEAR'S PLANNING WILL BE WASTED UNLESS GENERAL ATOMIC CO. IS ALLOWED TO EXPORT TRIGA III REACTOR, HE DECLARED. IN LETTER TO LIBYANS COMPANY SAID THAT AS OF JAN 21 USG POSITION MIGHT BE "SOFTENING". LIBYANS SAY THAT UNLESS EXPORT APPROVAL IS GRANTED WITHIN FOUR WEEKS, THEY WILL "TURN ELSEWHERE", AND IMPLY THAT BILATERAL RELATIONS WILL SUFFER. EMBASSY SUGGESTS U.S. REPLY THAT EXPORT OF REACTOR CANNOT BE AUTHORIZED AT THIS TIME OWING TO POLITICAL REALITIES IN BOTH MIDDLE EAST AND U.S. WE REGRET IF LIBYAN OFFICIALS HAVE FELT MISLED. IT WAS NOT USG'S INTENTION TO DO SO. DEPT WELCOMES CONTINUED TRAINING OF LIBYAN STUDENTS IN U.S. IN ALL FIELDS, INCLUDING NUCLEAR ENGINEERING. END SUMMARY.

2. LIBYAN ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION DIRECTOR GENERAL, ABDUL FATAH ASKANJI, ASKED TO SEE CHARGE FEB 18. FOREIGN MINISTRY ECONOMIC DIRECTOR SHINAIB AND POLITICAL OFFICER POPE WERE PRESENT. IT WAS CLEAR SUMMONS WAS TO RECEIVE A
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DEMARCHE ON PROBLEM OF LIBYAN BID TO BUY ATOMIC RESEARCH

REACTOR FROM U.S. ASKANJI INDICATED AT BEGINNING HE WAS SPEAKING FOR RCC MEMBER MUHAYSHI WHO SUPERVISES NUCLEAR RESEARCH PROGRAM.

3. ASKANJI SAID HE WAS PUZZLED AND BITTER OVER USG APPARENT UNWILLINGNESS TO PROCEED ON EXPORT OF TRIGA III REACTOR AND FISSIONABLE MATERIALS. HE SHOWED LETTER OF JAN 31 ADDRESSED TO HIM BY GENERAL ATOMIC COMPANY WHICH REVIEWED COMPANY'S DEALINGS WITH USG ON SUBJECT. ESSENCE OF LETTER WAS THAT GENERAL ATOMIC HAD BEEN TOLD IN APRIL 1974 BY USAEC THAT COMPANY HAD PERMISSION TO CONCLUDE NEGOTIATIONS WITH LIBYANS TO SUPPLY REACTOR AND FUEL. NOW, COMPANY SAID, DESPITE PREVIOUS ASSURANCES, PERMISSION HAD BEEN WITHDRAWN BY USG WITHOUT EXPLANATION. UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES, COMPANY REGRETTED TO INFORM LIBYANS THAT IT COULD NOT FULFILL CONTRACT. GENERAL ATOMIC LETTER DID HOLD OUT SMALL RAY OF HOPE, HOWEVER. IT SAID THAT ON JAN 21 DEPT OFFICIAL HAD TELEPHONED COMPANY TO SAY U.S. ATTITUDE MIGHT BE "SOFTENING". ASKANJI ALSO SHOWED COPY OF ORIGINAL USAEC LETTER OF APRIL 1974 TO GENERAL ATOMIC GIVING COMPANY GO-AHEAD TO SIGN CONTRACT.

4. ASKANJI SAID FOR PAST YEAR LIBYAN PLANNING HAD BEEN BASED ON ACQUISITION TO TRIGA III RESEARCH REACTOR FROM GENERAL ATOMIC. 128 LIBYAN STUDENTS HAD BEEN SENT TO U.S. ON THIS ASSUMPTION FOR STUDY IN FIELDS RELATED TO NUCLEAR ENGINEERING (TRIPOLI 1237). THERE WERE 50 MORE STUDENTS READY TO GO, BUT THEIR DEPARTURE WAS BEING DELAYED PENDING DECISION ON TRIGA III REACTOR. IF LIBYA COULD NOT GET REACTOR, ASKANJI SAID, YEAR OF PLANNING WOULD HAVE BEEN WASTED, AND IT WOULD BE FORCED TO "TURN ELSEWHERE". HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY U.S. WAS "SLAMMING DOOR IN OUR FACE". HE HAD ARGUED WITHIN LIBYAN GOVT FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION WITH U.S.; WHAT WAS HE TO SAY NOW? HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND USG CHANGE OF MIND. SPEAKING "AS A SCIENTIST", BUT WITH MFA REP AT HIS SIDE, ASKANJI SAID U.S. REFUSAL TO EXPORT REACTOR AND FUEL WOULD HAVE EFFECT OF FURTHER WORSENING BILATERAL RELATIONS.

5. CHARGE SAID WE WERE INTERESTED TO HEAR ABOUT LIBYAN
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PROGRAM. THIS WAS FIRST TIME LIBYAN OFFICIALS HAD EXPLAINED IT TO US. WHILE WE WERE NOT IN POSITION TO GIVE ANY ANSWERS TODAY, ASKANJI'S COMMENTS WOULD BE CONVEYED TO WASHINGTON. WE ADDED THAT WE HAVE NOTICED CERTAIN RECENT STATEMENTS BY CHAIRMAN QADHAFI TO PRESS, IMPLYING STRONGLY THAT LIBYAN INTEREST IN NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY WAS NOT ENTIRELY PEACEFUL.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1986

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TRIPOLI 0200

EXDIS

6. ASKANJI AND SHINAIB LAUGHED AND SAID WE SHOULD NOT BELIEVE WHAT WE READ IN FOREIGN PRESS. USG, WITH ITS INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES, MUST SURELY KNOW IT WAS FAR BEYOND LIBYAN KNOWHOW TO PRODUCE NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES. REACTOR AND FUEL WERE STRICTLY FOR TRAINING. "IT IS JUST LIKE BUYING A CAR". IN ANY CASE, AMOUNT OF FISSIONABLE MATERIALS IN QUESTION WAS FAR FROM SUFFICIENT TO PRODUCE A BOMB, AND U.S. AND SOVIET UNION CONTROLLED ACCESS TO FISSIONABLE MATERIALS ANYWAY.

7. WAS LIBYA PREPARED TO OBSERVE IAEA SAFEGUARDS? CERTAINLY, ASKANJI ANSWERED. GENERAL ATOMIC HAD BEEN ON POINT OF SUBMITTING SAFETY ANALYSIS TO IAEA BOARD OF GOVERNORS WHEN WORK ON PROGRAM HAD BEEN STOPPED.

8. IN CONCLUSION, ASKANJI ASKED HOW SOON HE COULD EXPECT ANSWER. WE SAID WE COULD NOT SAY. LOOKING AT HIS WATCH, ASKANJI SAI
THAT UNLESS FAVORABLY DECISION WERE MADE
"WITHIN FOUR WEEKS FROM TODAY", LIBYA WOULD BE FORCED TO
"TURN ELSEWHERE". SHINAIB OF MFA ADDED THAT A NEGATIVE
ANSWER WOULD "INCREASE TENSION".

9. COMMENT: WE AGREE (STATE 20585) IT DIFFICULT TO SEE JUSTIFICATION IN CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION FOR USG TO AUTHORIZE SALE. SINCE GERMANS HAVE BEEN TOLD OUR ANTICIPATED POSITION IN THIS REGARD AND SINCE LIBYANS HAVE A POINT ABOUT BEING MISLED BY OUR CONFLICTING SIGNALS

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LAST YEAR, SUGGEST WE REPLY TO LIBYANS REASONABLY SOON IN WASHINGTON OR IN TRIPOLI ALONG FOLLOWING LINES: EXPORT OF REACTOR CANNOT BE AUTHORIZED AT THIS TIME OWING TO POLITICAL REALITIES IN BOTH MIDDLE EAST AND U.S. WE REGRET IF LIBYAN OFFICIALS HAVE FELT MISLED. IT WAS NOT USG'S INTENTION TO DO SO. WE WILL KEEP LIBYAN REQUEST IN MIND AND IF SITUATION CHANGES, MIGHT CONSIDER REOPENING MATTER. U.S. WELCOMES CONTINUED TRAINING OF LIBYAN STUDENTS IN U.S. IN ALL FIELDS, INCLUDING NUCLEAR ENGINEERING.

10. SUCH A QUALIFIED NEGATIVE RESPONSE WOULD AT LEAST PUT REGIME LEADERSHIP ON NOTICE THAT QADHAFI'S IRRESPONSIBILITY CAN BE A HANDICAP AND THAT HE CANNOT OPPOSE IMPORTANT U.S. INTERESTS WITH IMPUNITY.
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